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ABSTRACT

From 1980 to 1990, the number of native Spanish speakers in the service region of Virginia's Germanna Community College (GCC) increased significantly. In response, GCC implemented a Spanish language occupational/technical curricula for law enforcement personnel and health professionals. Classes focused on the development of highly effective listening skills, with secondary importance placed on speaking skills. In addition, flexible course schedules were implemented to accommodate the medical and law enforcement rotating shift schedules. To target listening as the primary skill, a video-based instructional program with written materials was implemented and presented in a distance learning telecourse format to permit flexibility. In the program's first semester, 45 students enrolled, with 20% of these completing the 2-semester program. For 7 students who finished the sequence and took a voluntary placement test, 86% performed at the same level as peers in traditional classroom-based courses. GCC is planning an English language telecourse on Latin American Studies with an emphasis on Latino social, political, religious, economic, and cultural problems in the late 20th century. The courses also meet new state requirements that all technical degree programs include a humanities requirement. (TGI)

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Real Problems and Real Solutions: A Humanities/Foreign Language Component in Occupational/Technical Curricula

by

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The service region of Germanna Community College encompasses seven counties (Culpeper, Orange, Madison, Spotsylvania, Stafford, King George, and Caroline) and one independent city (Fredericksburg) in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The western part of the service region is primarily rural and agricultural while the eastern part of the region includes the burgeoning population of the Interstate-95 corridor, connecting Washington, D.C. with the state capital and points north and south. In the last several years, two of the counties of the service region, Stafford and Spotsylvania, have become part of the fastest growing population areas of the Commonwealth of Virginia with population increases of 52% and 69% respectively in the last decade (*Virginia Statistical Abstracts* 585-607).

The projected population growth of the service region by the year 2000, at an average rate of 21.4%, exceeds the projected growth rate of the state at 13%. These population increases have had parallel effects on the population of the community college. The actual growth rate of the college since 1988 is 29%, and the projected annual growth rate of Germanna to the year 2000, 9.6%, has surpassed the expected growth rate of other community colleges in the Virginia system. Statistics also validate that the number of students enrolling in courses in the Division of Humanities, English, Mathematics, and Social Sciences has grown more rapidly than has the population of the College and the service region. The Humanities Division has increased full-time equivalent students by 59% since 1988 while the Business/Technology Division's full-time equivalent students have decreased 2% in the same time period.

Likewise, the population growth of the Hispanic community within the Commonwealth of Virginia and within the Germanna service region has experienced even greater change. According to statistics of the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1980 the Hispanic population of the Commonwealth was 79,668 or 1.49% of the total population; in 1990 this same language group numbered 160,871 or 2.6% of the total population. Within the Germanna service region, there were 1810 Hispanics in the area (1.06%) in 1980; their numbers grew to 4045 in 1990 (2%), more than doubling in ten years. Because of the rapid change in demographics among native Spanish speakers, the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia recently mandated

the introduction of a certification program for Spanish-language interpreters within the Virginia court system. The Spanish language was targeted because it represents the largest percentage of non-English speaking residents within the Commonwealth.

Hispanics have settled in the Germanna service region for various reasons. First, service jobs are plentiful in the Northern Virginia/Washington, D.C. area, but the cost of living is very high. Many employees live further south along the Interstate-95 corridor and commute to their jobs on a daily basis. Second, with the expanding population along the Interstate-95 corridor, there are more job opportunities in hotel/motel and restaurant services and the construction industry. In the western part of the service region, agriculture is booming; Hispanics find jobs working on tobacco farms, at orchards, and at winerys. Local schools have expanded their ESL services, and regional social service agencies work with greater numbers of Hispanic clientele. Both regional hospitals in the Germanna service region have increasing numbers of patients whose native language is Spanish and who do not speak English extensively.

I joined the faculty at Germanna in the fall of 1993 to teach Spanish and to coordinate the foreign language program. At that time the only Spanish classes that were offered to students were the sequence of beginning and intermediate transfer courses that fulfill the foreign language requirements for the Associate in Arts and Sciences degree. These courses targeted five skills in second language acquisition - listening, understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. I immediately began to lobby other faculty from occupational/technical disciplines to see if they were interested in my developing Spanish courses aimed at specific occupational/technical curricula. All my colleagues thought it would be a good idea for students to study a foreign language, but no one indicated any interest in pursuing any specialized occupation-specific courses.

Within a period of three months, lay advisory committees began to meet for their discussions on the relevance of the occupational/technical curricula as they relate to job availability and job descriptions of the real world. The first indication of change occurred at the lay advisory meeting for the College's Criminal Justice program. One advisory member, a local Chief of Police in the service region, indicated that students in the Criminal Justice program needed to be exposed to more Humanities courses and fewer courses that detail day-to-day activities of law enforcement officers. The rationale for this statement was that officers are

trained by the departments who employ them in job-specific tasks because each department has its own set of procedures. Criminal Justice students need to be exposed to more general education offerings in the area of Humanities so that they will be well-rounded members of the communities for which they serve. Additionally, the local police and sheriff's departments were responding to more and more calls involving Hispanics, and officers were unable to communicate with the parties involved in the disturbances.

The second contact came from the director of the education department at one of the service region's hospitals that works closely with the College to provide clinical practice in the nursing program. The hospital's education department relayed information through our Director of Nursing that personnel were unable to communicate with Hispanic patients at the hospital or with maintenance and food service employees of Hispanic descent. The hospital was forced to rely on one or two bilingual nurses who could interpret at times when immediate and accurate communication was critical to the recovery of the patient.

I contacted both the Chief of Police and the Director of the Education Department at the hospital to see if the foreign language faculty at the College could be of assistance in solving these problems within the community. After lengthy discussions with these administrators and tours of the facilities that included conversations with additional employees from varied areas of responsibility, the College committed to offering its first occupational/technical Spanish classes — Basic Spoken Spanish for Law Enforcement Professionals, and Spanish for Health Professionals. The employees wanted to learn occupationally specific vocabulary, they placed primary importance on the development of highly effective listening skills with secondary importance on speaking skills, and they wanted classes that were flexible in when they were offered because most medical and law enforcement personnel work on rotating shift schedules.

These three requirements posed certain problems for the standard course offerings at the community college. Of major concern was how to deliver the language course in such a way that students could attend class at basically any time of the day or night. This difficulty was overcome by incorporating distance learning techniques in second language instruction. With the assistance of the Director of Information Services, the College purchased the video series *Destinos* from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This Spanish-language "soap opera" had been developed as a television course with ancillary audio and written materials to guide students

in an independent study of the language. Because students are listening to and viewing video tapes twice a week, they focus on developing listening skills so that they can follow the story line of the series. The written and audio materials that accompany the videos guide their syntactic and phonemic language development so that when they finish the course of study, they are able to carry on simple conversations with native speakers and understand most of anything said to them.

The distance learning format in the form of a telecourse gives needed flexibility in course scheduling, and the video-based instructional program targets listening as the primary second-language acquisition skill. In order to provide occupation-specific vocabulary, students work with special occupational language aids in the form of texts with accompanying audio cassettes. With the basic *Destinos* materials students learn the rudiments of communication in Spanish, and with the occupation-specific materials they learn the vocabulary needed to transmit and receive the information in order to perform their duties. The final project that all students complete is the development of a personalized occupational script in Spanish that they can use in the future as a guide for carrying on technical conversations within their professional areas. Many students laminate their occupational scripts for future use in the work place, and I make individualized audio cassettes of each script for subsequent student use.

Students watch two half-hour episodes of *Destinos* each week, broadcast over local access cable TV stations or viewed in regional libraries. They also complete oral and written exercises from the text and the workbook and spend an average of two hours preparing for each half-hour episode. The Spanish instructors divide the 52-episode *Destinos* language program into a two-semester project; students view 26 episodes each fifteen-week semester. The video tapes and the ancillary text materials not only present the rudiments of the Spanish language; they also provide general historical, social, political, and cultural information on the geographic areas of the world in which Spanish is spoken. The four targeted geographic areas of concentration in the video series are Spain, Argentina, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. There is also commentary from the protagonist of the story on her family's experiences living in Southern California as members of the Chicano culture. The video series and text materials explain regional phonemic and lexic differences so that students in this second-language acquisition program receive exposure to a

broad spectrum of dialects and vocabulary that are present in the Hispanic community of the United States.

Students who enrolled in Germanna's Spanish telecourses were not just from the medical and criminal justice professions. Faculty and administration quickly learned that there were dental hygienists, social workers, court clerks, attorneys, and ESL instructors who needed to take a Spanish course in order to develop professional communication skills. Faculty discovered that more occupation-specific materials were necessary to meet the needs of the individual students and at times found it necessary to develop some occupation-specific materials themselves because none existed. We also discovered that in order for this program to be successful, faculty had to provide an opportunity for students to work with them one-on-one. We established monthly help sessions held at regional locations so that students could easily meet with instructors to solve problems. One sheriff's department offered its "booking room" for a regional meeting site; other students got together with instructors in the regional hospital's cafeteria; another group met at an area public school. By going out into the community, faculty were able to work with students and to individualize the language program.

At the end of the first semester of offering occupational Spanish classes in an independent study/distance education format, 39% of the students enrolled successfully completed the course of study. Of the original 45 students enrolled, five chose to withdraw from the course early in the semester before there was any academic penalty. Those who withdrew either did not have enough time to devote to studying the material or were not adequately self-motivated to follow a rigorous schedule of independent study. There was however a significant number of students, 36%, who chose to request an incomplete for the course. For various reasons, mostly dealing with the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays and family responsibilities, they were unable to complete the course of study during the regular semester. These students were given an additional four months to complete the requirements of the course and receive a grade other than an F. Student performance in the two occupational Spanish classes in Fall 1994 is listed in Figure 1.

Germanna offered the same two courses during Spring 1995 as well as the continuation courses, SPA 104, Basic Conversational Spanish for Law Enforcement Professionals, and SPA 164, Spanish for Health Professionals. Instructors learned from the analysis of student

performance from the first semester that they must better inform students of the responsibilities that students assume in enrolling in an independent study/distance learning format. Therefore, faculty asked students to "soul search" before they committed to taking the occupational language class. Because of this, there were more students who chose to withdraw from the course without academic penalty, 27%, but there was also a greater number of students who successfully completed the course, 43%, and far fewer students who chose to request an incomplete, 11%. Student performance data on the Spring 1995 semester is also listed in Figure 1.

	Fall 1994 SPA 103/163	Spring 1995 SPA 103/163	Spring 1995 SPA 104/164
Total Enrolled	45	37	13
Number withdrawn without penalty (%)	5 (11%)[1]	10 (27%)	1 (8%)
Number A's (%)	12 (28%)	8 (22%)	7 (54%)
Number B's (%)	3 (7%)	6 (16%)	2 (15%)
Number C's (%)	2 (4%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)
Number D's (%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Number F's (%)	6 (14%)	7 (19%)	0 (0%)
Number Incompletes (%)	16 (36%)	4 (11%)	3 (23%)
% Successful of Original Students Enrolled	38%	43%	69%
% Successful of Those Completing Course	43%	59%	75%

[1] Percentages based on the original number of students enrolled.

Figure 1. Student Performance Data for SPA 103 and SPA 104, Basic Conversational Spanish, and SPA 163 and SPA 164, Spanish for Health Professionals. Data is from Fall 1994 and Spring 1995 semesters.

Those students who enrolled in the second part of the two-semester course of study decreased from the number of students who successfully completed the first part. Of the 17 who successfully completed the first semester, only 13 chose to enroll in the second semester. One student had to withdraw for personal reasons unrelated to the course, nine successfully completed the second part of the course of study, and three requested incompletes. Therefore, of the original 45 students who enrolled in the occupational/technical language program, nine or 20%

successfully completed the two-semester language program and are currently practicing communicating with clients in Spanish.

Of the sixteen students who requested incompletes at the end of the fall semester, only seven of them completed the requirements for the course in a timely fashion. The other nine students' grades became F's at the end of spring semester. Once again, there was a 43% completion rate among the "incomplete" category, paralleling the completion rate for the overall course. However, adding these additional seven students to the original number who completed the first semester of the course, the rate of success increased to 53%. Student performance data for the "incomplete" category is listed below in Figure 2.

	Number	Percent
Original Incompletes	16	36%
Number A's	5	31%
Number B's	1	6%
Number C's	0	0%
Number D's	1	6%
Number F's	9	57%
Change in Success	+ 7	+ 15%

Figure 2. Student Performance Data for the "Incomplete" Category from the Fall 1994 Semester.

While the linguistic material incorporated in the *Destinos* language program is equivalent to that presented in a traditional language text for the transfer course of study, the faculty needed to measure the actual language acquisition of telecourse students in relation to students in the traditional classroom setting. Germanna had adopted the ACT foreign language placement tests for use in placing incoming students at their appropriate level in the language curriculum. During the two years in which this instrument has been used to place students, over 95% of the students placed by the test succeeded in meeting the requirements of the level into which they had been placed. The faculty feel that this test is an accurate measure of student performance.

Students completing the second semester of the *Destinos* telecourse program were asked to voluntarily participate in the testing program, using the ACT placement test, to determine their levels of language acquisition. Of the 7 students taking the test, 86% of them placed at the first semester, intermediate level or higher, which is exactly where they should place if they were to continue with their second-language studies. Thus, 86% of the students studying Spanish via telecourse and in an independent format demonstrated that they could perform at the same level as their peers who completed the same courses in the traditional classroom setting. Figures 3 and 4 tabulate the ACT Spanish placement test data obtained from the two groups tested.

Number of Students Tested	Placement in SPA 101 (% successful)[2]	Placement in SPA 102 (% successful)	Placement in SPA 201 (% successful)	Placement in SPA 202 (% successful)
51	3 (100%)	6 (100%)	39 (95%)	3 (100%)

[2] Percent of number of students successfully completing the course at the level into which they were placed by test, in relation to the total number of students placed at that level.

Figure 3. GCC Students Taking ACT Spanish Placement Test to Evaluate Placement into Transfer Courses.

Number of Students Tested	Placement in SPA 101 (%)	Placement in SPA 102 (% of total)	Placement in SPA 201 (% of total)	Placement in SPA 202 (% of total)
7	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	5 (72%)	1 (14%)

Figure 4. Results of ACT Testing of Occupational Spanish Telecourse Students After Completion of Two-Semester Course of Study.

Two curricular changes have occurred in the last twelve months that affect the future Occupational Spanish classes at Germanna. During Fall 1994 the lead faculty of the Criminal Justice program initiated a request to alter that program's curriculum leading to the Associate's degree: one semester of Spanish is now a requirement for graduation from the program. The rationale for changing the graduation requirements is the fact that graduates seeking job opportunities in the more densely populated areas of Germanna's service region, or in the Northern Virginia area of the Washington, D.C. suburbs, require some knowledge of Spanish, if not bilingualism. Law enforcement personnel in these urban areas must be able to respond to a growing number of Hispanic residents in the community in which they serve. Second, the Virginia Community College System has recently stipulated that all Occupational/Technical degree programs must have a Humanities requirement. The Occupational Spanish classes meet both of these criteria — a language class and/or a Humanities course required for graduation from the College.

As a response to students who seek additional knowledge and understanding of Latino culture, another telecourse is being planned. The next course is an English-language class on Latin American Studies, also developed by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Annenberg Foundation. The *Americas* series targets all Latin American countries, no matter the language spoken, and compares and contrasts their development with and in relation to the United States. The focus of the course is on the diachronic and synchronic reasons for Latino social, political, religious, economic, and cultural problems in the late twentieth century. This course takes the Occupational Spanish students one step closer to full understanding of the Hispanic culture because it treats many Latin American issues that directly affect Latino immigration patterns in the United States. The course of study is not closed in its presentation of problems and solutions. It provides U.S. students with an opportunity to discuss and to ponder the status of Hispanic immigration and its consequences on U.S. policy both at home and abroad.

The future of Occupational Spanish programs at Germanna is bright because the course of study will meet both the needs of the students as graduation requirements and the needs of a community that has an expanding non-English speaking, Hispanic element. The *Destinos* video program and its related ancillary materials provide students with an introduction to the Spanish

language and the culture of the people who speak it. It addresses listening and speaking skills that are the targeted skills of lay advisory committees and professionals in the technical fields. Students will be better prepared to handle day-to-day professional situations involving Hispanic clientele, and they will assist in creating stronger community ties through better understanding and appreciation of multicultural diversity.

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